

Basic Interpretation Learning System

Making connections:
the essence of interpretation



Basic Interpretation Handbook

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with contributions by California State Parks staff

California State Parks

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Foreword

Interpretation is one of the most valuable means our Department has to accomplish its mission over the long term. At the same time that interpretation is one of our legally mandated responsibilities to the public, it is also among the highest callings of the park profession. The public's need to understand the value and significance of the parks and resources of this state has never been greater, and consequently, the Department's responsibility through its employees to provide high quality interpretive services has become more important than at any other time in its history.

California State Parks' Interpretation and Education Division and the William Penn Mott Jr. Training Center are pleased to introduce a new and innovative approach to learning about the art and science of interpretation.

This *Basic Interpretation Handbook* represents a major milestone in interpretive training. It provides our Department's first-ever comprehensive, standardized resource for introductory interpretation training. Intended primarily as a foundation for ranger and lifeguard cadets attending Basic Visitor Services training at the William Penn Mott Jr. Training Center, it is also a valuable guide for any interpreter who provides programs and services directly to the public. The handbook serves as both a stand-alone resource and as part of a cadet training package that includes companion student workbooks and instructor guides. The application of this learning for cadets is carried over to the Field Training Officer program in their initial field assignment.

Through this handbook and the related training that accompanies it, the Department is providing you with the tools to realize your full potential as an interpreter. Your active participation in training and learning is the essential ingredient in deriving benefit from this publication and, more importantly, translating its use into your interpretation with the public.

Preface

Welcome to the Basic Interpretation Learning System (BILS). This system consists of the Basic Interpretation Handbook, Student Workbook, Instructor Guide, and Field Training Officer Guide. Each component works in conjunction with the others to provide a framework for conducting personal interpretation in California State Parks. The *Basic Interpretation Handbook* is the central component of the system which all other elements relate. The handbook can also be used as a stand-alone resource, training guide, or reference tool.

BILS provides a unique approach to training and education in interpretation by incorporating nationally accepted theories, standards, and practices with specific California State Parks guidelines and requirements. The result is an instructional system geared toward students, practitioners, trainers, evaluators, and supervisors of interpretation in California State Parks. For those beginning their discovery of interpretation, it provides the history, theories, and basic skills in the art and science of interpretation. For the more experienced practitioners, the *Basic Interpretation Handbook* provides an in-depth look at improving message formation and a critical examination of evaluation methods and approaches. It also generates discussion of the needs, values, and goals of the profession itself. For managers, administrators, supervisors, and instructors, the BILS serves as a useful reference tool, resource guide, and benchmark for continuing the growth and development of the discipline of interpretation.

Module 1 provides an overview of interpretation. It begins with a brief review of some of the significant people, places, events, and organizations that have influenced the practice of interpretation. It ends with a brief synopsis of the definitions of interpretation and the various types of interpretive services provided in California State Parks. Module 2-Purpose and Value provides an in-depth review of the purpose and values of interpretation. It focuses on how interpretation works to connect visitors to the resource and to accomplish management goals and objectives. The basic communication process is the topic of Module 3-Communication. The steps of the communication process are examined, and techniques for improving communication effectiveness are reviewed. Once the principles and theories of interpretation are examined, Module 4-Planning expands on this basic understanding and provides an overview of the actual planning process for conducting programs.

Module 4-Planning begins the transition from background information and theory (Modules 1-3) to the art and science of practicing interpretation (Modules 4-11). Module 5-Programs covers the essential characteristics of the interpretive program. It forms the underlying structure of all interpretive communication and programs. Module 6-Talks centers around creating, designing, and conducting talks, and Module 7-Walks focuses on the same for interpretive walks. Module 8-Campfire! captures the art and design of one of the most popular California State Parks programs – campfires. Techniques and skills for conducting these special programs are reviewed in detail. Module 9-Kids! shifts gears and addresses the needs, challenges, and approaches for conducting programs with children. One of the most common duties performed by the interpreter is walking through the park and talking with visitors i.e. roving. Module 10-Roving conveys the essence of practicing roving interpretation. Module 11-Audiovisual, provides information on the various types of audiovisual equipment used by interpreters. Tips and pointers for when, where, and how to use the equipment makes Module 11-Audiovisual a useful resource and reference tool. The final component of providing interpretive services is to evaluate the

effectiveness of that service. Module 12-Evaluation introduces the reader to some useful, easy methods that can be implemented to assess the success of programs. Module 13-Professionalism ties the entire *Basic Interpretation Handbook* together by linking the work of interpreters, instructors, evaluators, field training officers, and supervisors with the discipline of interpretation itself. This module on professionalism reviews the rights and responsibilities of an interpreter to the public, the resource, and the science itself.

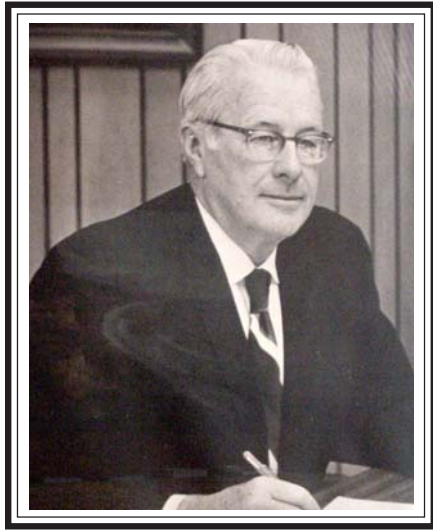
Our combined experiences, training, teachers, mentors, supervisors, and colleagues have taught us about the essence of interpretation: making connections. The Basic Interpretation Learning System was made possible through the efforts of many other caring, hard-working, and dedicated individuals. In fact, every student of interpretation and visitor to the parks served as a trainer and guide for us as we wrote this system. Although we hesitate to single out individuals because so many have helped make this project a success, there are a few special people that we would like to thank. Broc Stenman and Steve Wagy served as facilitators of this project. They had a vision and helped us create it. We thank Donna Pozzi and her staff for their support throughout this process. We thank Barbara Dolan-Wilkinson, whose tireless efforts, patience, and talent gave this publication graphic and visual life. In addition, although we had numerous editors, the efforts of Patricia Widner, Chris Beresford, Buzz Webb, and Judy Webb went above and beyond the call of duty. They gave us consistency, taught us more about the English language than we ever wanted to know, encouraged us, and were always available to help.

The following are others who helped us make this project a successful point along the continued development and growth of interpretation and its importance in California State Parks: Karen Beery, Jane Bertke, Laurena Cabanero, Brian Cahill, Joanie Cahill, Wes Chapin, Carol Cullens, Michelle Edwards, James Fitzpatrick, Dave Gould, Michael Green, Elizabeth Hammack, Mary Helmich, Ginger Henry, Wil Jorae, Summer Kincaid, John Kolb, Tom Lindberg, Jim Long, Pat McLatchey, John Mott, Donna Pozzi, Laura Reimche, Jenan Saunders, Broc Stenman, John Werminski, and Jonathan Williams.

Finally, we thank our partners, Alan Ward and Barbara Wilkinson, who endured the grueling hours, lengthy phone calls, meetings, and seemingly endless revisions. Their input and patience is much appreciated and was critical to the success of the final product.

Interpretation is built and founded upon love and passion. We loved creating and co-writing the Basic Interpretation Learning System, and working together on it was a great pleasure. We hope that it helps you develop the skills and techniques necessary for passing the passion on to others. *Making connections is the essence of interpretation, and we hope this connects with you.*

Dedication



Americans hold the park ranger in highest regard, and value and look forward to interpretive programs whenever they visit a national park. This relationship between interpreter and visitor, in turn, generates broad support for parks throughout the nation.

William Penn Mott, Jr.

William Penn Mott, Jr. was a visionary. We know this from his work, his words, and how others remember him.

Bill Mott always understood that people preserve those places and things that they love and understand. He also recognized long ago that the keys to understanding are education and communication, two endeavors in which he always excelled. Without his keen ability to communicate the necessity for preserving parks and open space, our natural estate would be infinitely reduced.

Lamar Alexander, 1992

- Superintendent of Parks for the City of Oakland
- General Manager of the East Bay Regional Park District
- Director of California Department of Parks and Recreation
- Founder of California State Parks Foundation
- Director of National Park Service

Mott's Principles of Leadership

- **Be visionary:** guide today's decisions by tomorrow's reality.
- **Think creatively:** dare to try new and controversial ideas.
- **Be assertive:** market and sell a quality product.
- **Share the credit:** hire good people and let them do their jobs.
- **Educate your constituency:** trust them to make an informed choice.
- **Never give up:** hold on to your dreams until they come true.

Adapted from *Prophet of the Parks: The Story of William Penn Mott, Jr.* Mary Ellen Butler, 1999



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